

in his memory. He is the only priest buried in that cemetery.

Father Sullivan was assisted at various times by Fathers H. Reinhart, in 1871, and Augustine Moreh and Thomas Ackley in 1873, and J. A. Butler in 1882.

The Rev. W. F. O. Mahoney was here briefly in the fall of 1883, and Fathers A. J. Gerhard and P. F. Knox assisted the parish in the summer of 1883.

First Baptism

The Rev. Mathias J. Ward performed his first baptism in St. Thomas church on July 8, 1883. He performed his last baptism on March 3, 1915, and died on March 31 that same year.

Born Jan. 7, 1847, in Eden, Fond du Lac county, he was ordained at the age of 25 on Dec. 22, 1872. And, almost 12 years to the day after his ordination, Father Ward was to face one of the greatest tragedies and greatest tasks of his life when the original stone church burned to the ground.

Father Ward studied for the priesthood at St. Francis seminary at St. Francis, Wis., and was ordained by Bishop John Martin Henni. He was sent to the Beloit parish 11 years later from Benton, Wis.

Just two days before Christmas in the year 1884, St. Thomas church was destroyed by fire. The fire is said to have originated in the house east of the church, formerly occupied by the teaching sisters, but at that time being rented for a boarding house. The house was nearly consumed by flames and the church roof was ablaze when volunteer firemen arrived.

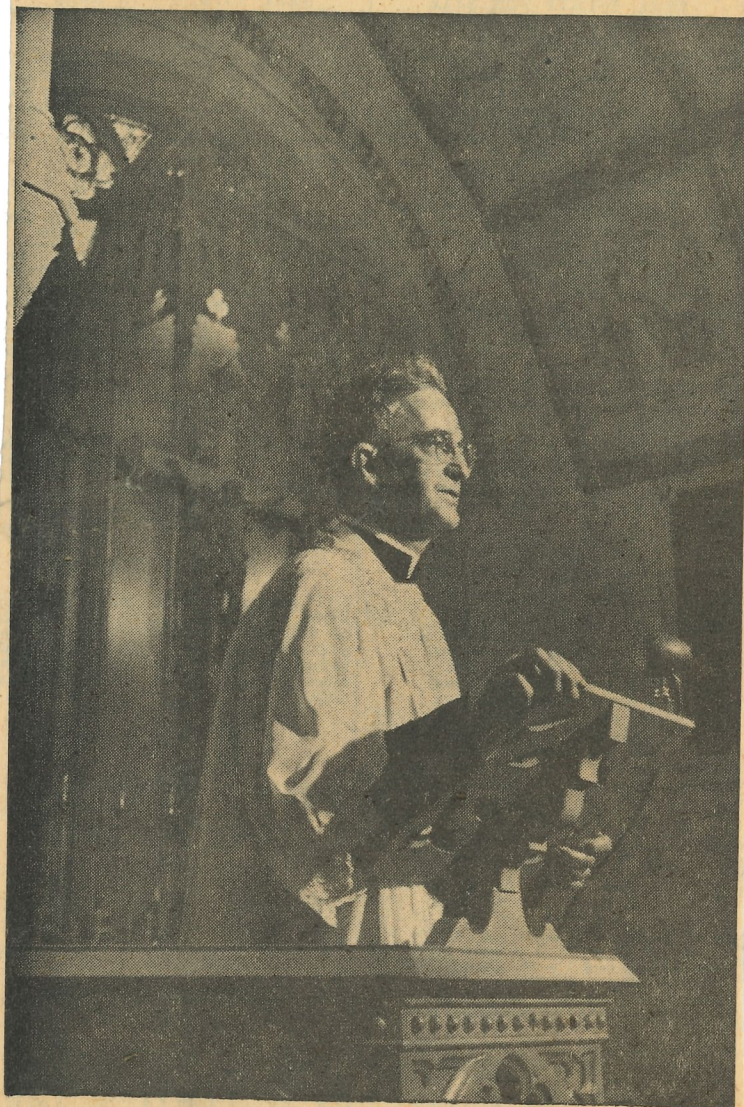
Despite the efforts of the firemen and citizens, the church was gutted, and only the statutes of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph were saved.

Parishioners Dejected

The heroic pastor was heartbroken and dejected as were the weeping parishioners. The story is told that the fire made Beloit realize that it needed a regular paid fire department.

The volunteers pumped the fire wells and all neighboring cisterns dry, and had the church fire nearly under control when the water supply was exhausted. Firemen were so disgusted that they heaved snowballs into the blazing ruins.

The colored people of the community, who had migrated here from the South and its slavery during the Civil war period, offered the use of their hall for services on Christmas day. A short time later, Hanchett's hall, which still stands at the corner of State and Broad sts., was prepared as a place to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the mass. It was at this same hall that Lincoln, years earlier, made his famous Beloit appearance.



Pictured here in the pulpit of Beloit's Church of St. Thomas the Apostle, is the Rev. Thomas A. O'Reilly, who has served the church as pastor for the past 20 years, and under whose direction the church has progressed rapidly. The oldest Catholic parish in Beloit, St. Thomas's was founded in 1853. Destruction of the first church by fire in 1884 was followed by the erection of the present edifice, which is pictured at right as parishioners leave a late Sunday morning Mass. The structure has been completely redecorated inside, and a new altar has been installed. The exterior has been sand blasted to restore the brick and masonry to its original appearance. The job was only partly completed when the picture was made. Curate of St. Thomas's from 1903 to 1909 was the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph E. Hanz, (inset) who, founded St. Jude's parish on the west side because of the growing Catholic population in Beloit. There are about 5,800 Catholics in Beloit now. St. Thomas' membership is 2,600; St. Jude's, 2,800, and St. Paul's 400.



THE BELOIT (Wis.) DAILY NEWS, SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 1953

Centennial Year of St. Thomas'

Parish Ends in May

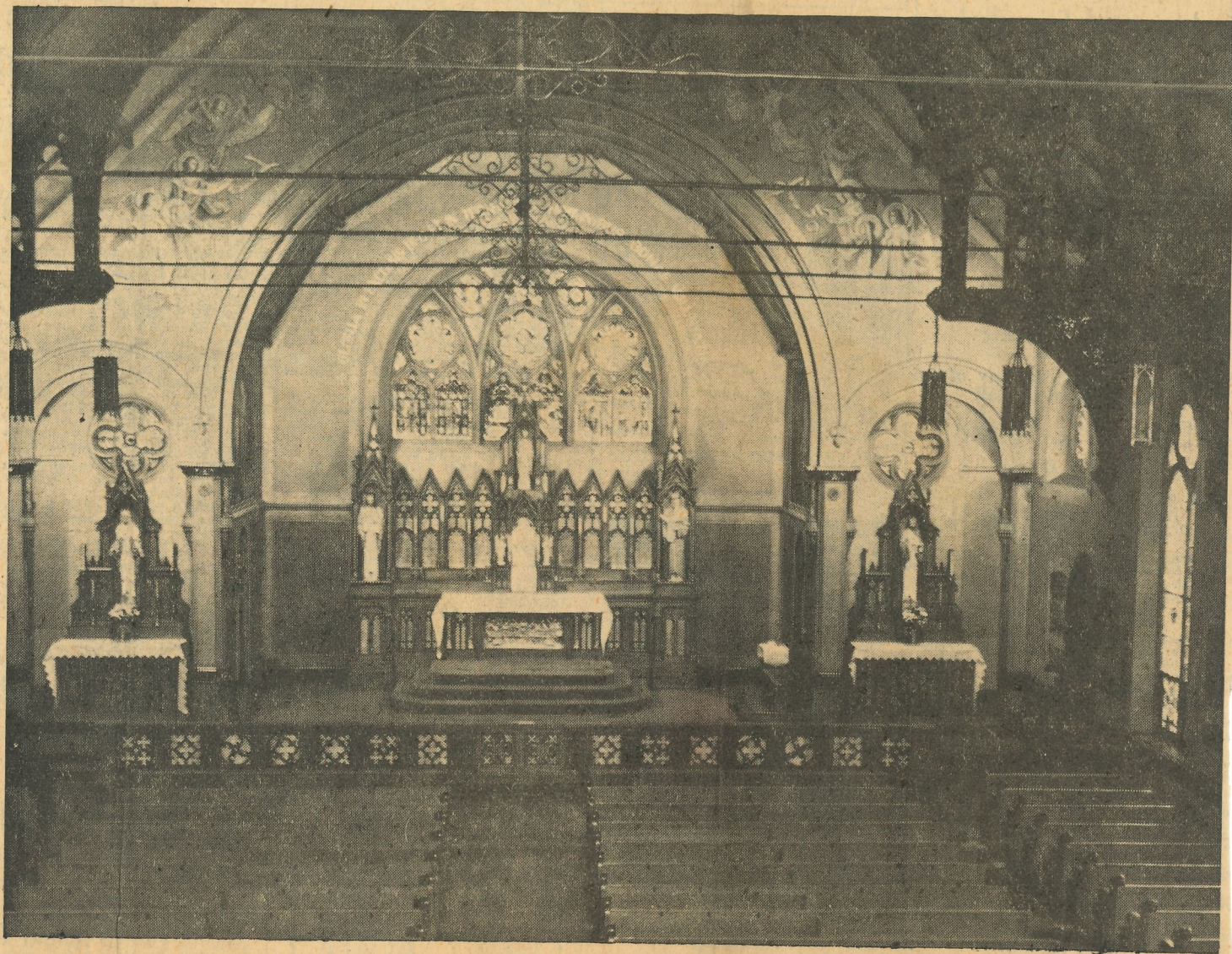


Hooded for protection against dust, Bill Wright is pictured sand blasting the church to wear off dirt.



Dick Hansen, 11, gets a playful jostling administered in Father O'Reilly's typical friendly manner.

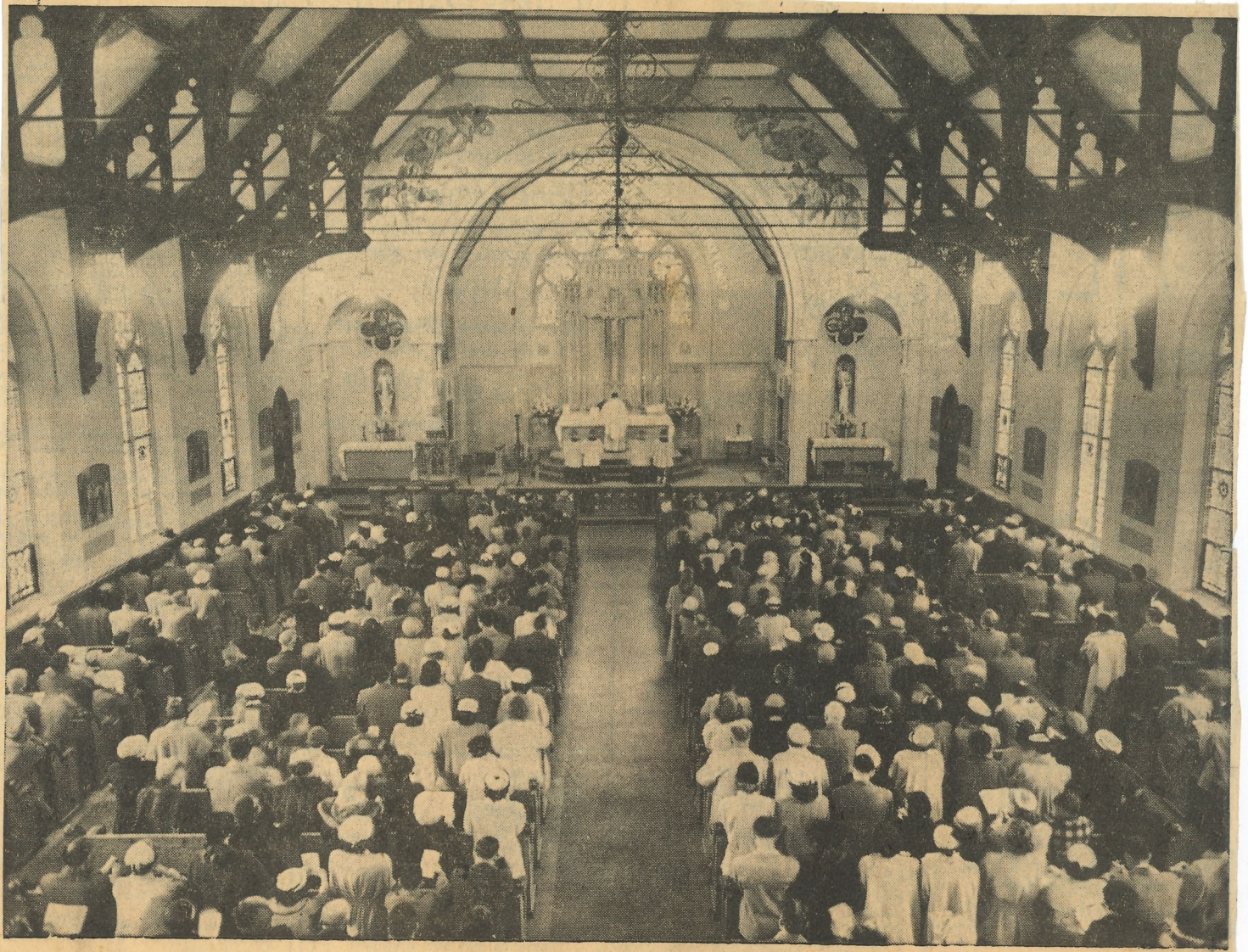
Daily News
Photos
by
Bill Behling



This photo shows the interior of the church before redecorating began. The old altar, installed in 1885, was a large, ornate unit. The church has been redecorated several times since it was rebuilt.



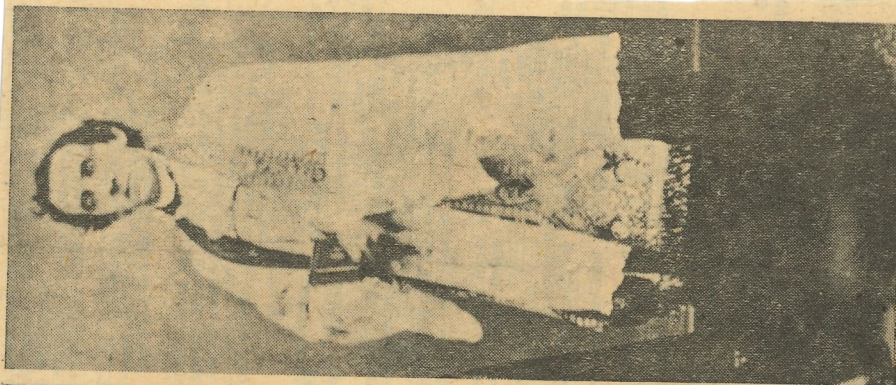
This picture, which is about 50 years old, shows the Rev. Mathias J. Ward, pastor of St. Thomas's from 1883 to 1915, at the State and Grand intersection.



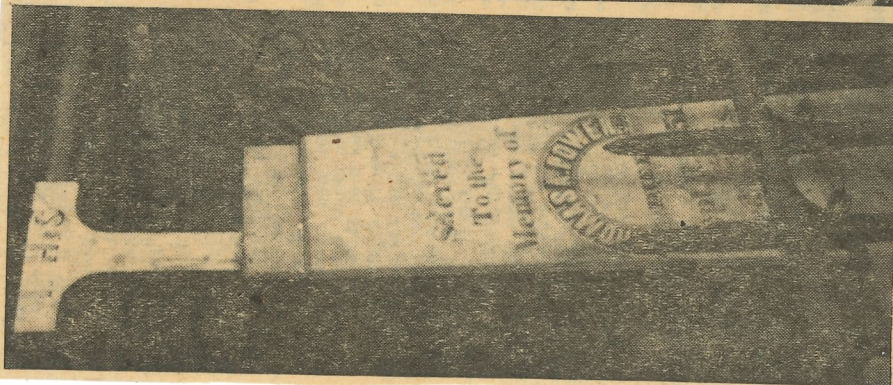
Above is the interior of the church as it now appears. The new altar is of white oak and has a German carved crucifix. Also new are the side altars. Murals have been retouched, and a new floor installed.



Pictured here with a group of St. Thomas school boys in one of the school's modern classrooms, is the Rev. John W. Collins, who came to Beloit in 1950. An army chaplain during World War II, Father Collins is popular with the school children, and directs the church choir. He is a native of Grand Rapids, Mich.



Pastor of St. Thomas's from 1866 to 1883 was the Rev. Richard Sullivan, who is the only priest buried in Calvary cemetery here. Father Sullivan helped establish a Sisters of St. Agnes school here.



Beneath the front of St. Thomas church are the graves of Capt. and Mrs. T. A. Powers, in whose home the infant St. Thomas parish met for several years. The Powers' gave the site of the present church.

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Present St. Thomas Church Was Built in 1885 After Fire; Many Advancements Occur Since That Time

By Minnie Mills Enking

A \$20 gold coin offered by a Presbyterian friend of the Rev. Mathias J. Ward was the first contribution to a fund for rebuilding St. Thomas' Catholic church after the terrible fire of 1884 which consumed the first stone church of the oldest Catholic parish in Beloit. The fund grew in the months that followed, and a new stone church was erected on the same East Grand avenue in 1885.

The Hon. Benjamin Brown, grandfather of the late Dr. E. B. Brown, was also among the first Protestants to call on Father Ward to offer sympathy and encouragement, and to urge him to accept the burden and carry on.

While funds were being raised and the new church under construction, mass was celebrated on week days, and marriages and baptisms were performed in the rectory.

The young priest disposed of his horse and buggy, a gift from his father when he came to Beloit, and left Beloit on a temperance lecture tour. Proceeds from the lectures were destined for the church building fund.

On March 23, 1885, J. J. Pierron, Patrick Fitzgerald and Father Ward met as a board of directors to name an advisory committee which would assist in making plans for rebuilding the church. Thomas Moran, L. E. Cunningham and J. G. Wickhem were named to the committee, and Wickhem was made secretary.

When the board and committee met in June, they decided to build a new church on the same site at a maximum cost of \$14,000. The plans of J. J. Egan, Chicago architect, were accepted later that month.

Pierron was the only person to disagree with a suggestion that the old walls be torn down immediately. The directors and committee retaliated by voting that Pierron be authorized to employ help and superintend the razing of the ruins.

The building was nearing completion in the fall of 1885 when George H. Hess & Co. was authorized to install two furnaces at a cost of \$800. The furnaces were "guaranteed to heat 70 degrees in all kinds of weather," according to notations in the director's minute book. The Messrs. Winslow and Rosenberg were engaged to install a tin roof "of the best quality for \$6.50 a square."

No mention is made in the minute book of the completion nor dedication of the church. However it is known from one of the priest's notations that the congregation which supported the building of the new church numbered about 1,000 members.

The house which had once served as a convent was not rebuilt, since the new church covered portions of the lot on which the convent had been located. The rectory, a dwelling brought down from the "college bluff," was improved during Father Ward's time and still stands as part of the present rectory of the church.



The work of the Peter Claver house, an inter racial organization supported by Catholics to provide leisure time activities for all races and faiths in Beloit, is directed by the Rev. Roman A. Wiedholz, an assistant at St. Thomas' church. He is pictured here teaching a Bible class of several members (reading clockwise) Jewel Golden, Annette Davis, Mrs. Charles Van Elverdinghe (staff member), Ochi Mae Golden, Harry Gup-ton, Jr., Mrs. Dan Kelley (staff member Mrs. Lucretia Gantt, Kathryn Simmons, Marlene Edwards, Elizabeth Simmons and Dale Edwards. (BDN photo by Behling)

conducted his work to the satisfaction of everyone, and when it was decided in 1906 that a new church was needed on the west side of Beloit, Father Hanz was selected to do the organizing. Through his untiring efforts, he established St. Jude's church, built the church edifice, a rectory, Brother Dutton school and a convent.

All Beloit mourned when Father Ward died in Beloit General hospital, March 31, 1915. The front page obituary appearing the following day in the Beloit Daily News reported that Father Ward died while undergoing surgery for a brain abscess which he had suffered for two years. A few days later, huge crowds jammed the church and street outside for his funeral.

Coming here in April, 1915, the Rev. J. F. Ryan ministered the needs of the parish until late in 1920. He was replaced by the Rev. S. J. Dowling. Father Dowling served the church for three years, before the Rev. C. F. McBride received his Beloit assignment. The Rev. A. F. Leist succeeded Father McBride in 1928. He was replaced by the Rev. T. A. O'Reilly, the present pastor.

While in Beloit, Father Ryan celebrated the silver jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood at St. Francis Seminary in 1894. He held the chair of English at the seminary for 18 years before coming to Beloit. His faithful parishioners presented him with a new car and a purse of money at a celebration held in the Knights of Columbus hall. The Rev. George J. Hegeman, his assistant, organized much of the observance.

In the years before he came to Beloit, Father McBride served the Cathedral parish of the archdiocese in Milwaukee, and was one of the youngest priests ever called to administer the affairs of this important parish. A lover of literature and music, Father McBride was said to have possessed the ability to "combine the administration of secular affairs with ecclesiastical duties." He was credited with reorganizing the financial affairs of the church organization, and establishing the parish on a sound business basis.

The only curate to serve here under Father McBride, was the Rev. Raymond J. Mahoney, who left Beloit in 1928 to assume the pastorate of the Evansville church. At the same time they welcomed the Rev. A. F. Leist, members of the congregation presented Father Mahoney with a purse of money and other gifts.

IN January, 1923, during the Rev. C. F. McBride's appointment here, E. A. Netzing was elected secretary, and J. H. Crowley, treasurer, of the congregation. J. H. Hayes was made assistant treasurer. Board members were E. A. Daley, T. J. Kelley, E. J. Lathers, and J. Dewey Rosenthal. Later that year, William Quinn replaced Netzing as secretary, and Netzing was made treasurer. A janitor was hired for \$35 per month in summer and \$50 per month in winter.

ing of St. Thomas' church, with parish communion at masses, a jubilee dinner, and solemn benediction in the evening. Father O'Reilly celebrated the solemn high mass, and Monsignor Joseph Barbican, Milwaukee, delivered the sermon. J. H. Crowley was toastmaster at the dinner. Speakers included the Hon. Lorenzo Rosenthal, Mrs. Arthur Walsh, Father Joseph E. Hanz, and the Hon. John D. Wickhem, justice of the Wisconsin Supreme court.

Celebrant of the benediction was Monsignor J. J. Clark of St. Francis seminary, and the Rev. Thomas O'Shaughnessy, Roscobel, gave the sermon. A purposeful statement on the program for the observance read, "For church and country, may we never forsake the God of our pioneers, builders of the temple."

The day of Father Ulik's departure marked the day of the Rev. John F. Nolan's arrival. Father Nolan was transferred to Madison Aug. 20, 1941, and later became a chaplain in World War II. He was replaced by the Rev. Francis E. Dougherty, who seven years later was appointed to a parish in Doylestown, Wis., June 10, 1948.

He was succeeded by the Rev. James G. Kramer, who served the parish from June 10, 1948 to Sept. 5, 1950, when he was appointed assistant superintendent of Catholic schools in the Madison diocese.

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THINGS settled down to normal after the church was rebuilt and no exciting events were recorded for a few years, aside from Father Ward's fiery temperance lectures which were the talk of the country in the pre-prohibition era.

Active organizations in the parish in the '80's included the Catholic Knights, Ladies Aid society, League of the Sacred Heart, Catholic Reading circle, and the Court of Catholic Lady Foresters. Father Ward was director of the Catholic Knights of Wisconsin.

Records of the Meneely Bell Co. Troy, N. Y., show that the 3,000 pound church bell was shipped to Beloit from the foundry on July 30, 1889, and presumably installed in the tower a short time later. It wasn't until 1946, however, that an electric bell ringing system, including an angelus ringer and funeral tollor, was installed.

Father Ward was asked to investigate the cost of installing electric lights in January, 1894, the year John S. Kinney was named secretary, and Wickhem, treasurer, of the board of directors. That March, the Beloit Electric Plant, represented by G. L. Cole, manager, was hired to install 59 lamps and five switches at a cost of \$134.90. The changes and repairs were made in the rectory at a cost of \$1,300.

John J. Riordan, who later became Beloit's postmaster, was elected treasurer of the church board in 1896. By 1900, the parish had saved enough money to engage the Associated Artists of Milwaukee to do the frescoe work on the church. William Quinn was elected secretary of the board in 1903. Charles Bush took over the office in 1909. Further repairs and improvements on the rectory were voted in 1913, when the board decided to borrow a corporate note for \$1,500 to cover the cost.

In a history of the church written by the late Miss Catherine Burns, it is noted that "Father Ward personally instructed all children of the parish, and insisted that they take a pledge, when receiving their first Holy Communion, to refrain from tasting any intoxicating liquor until they were 21.

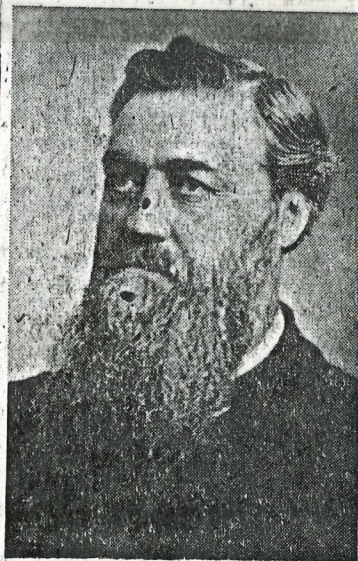
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Father Ryan's transfer to St. Patrick's church in Janesville created quite a furor among parishioners and others in the city. His promotion to the seat of the deanery came as a surprise, and parishioners circulated petitions which were presented to Archbishop Messmer, urging that the priest remain in his present charge. Personal letters from leading Protestants were also sent to the archbishop.

The popular priest was responsible for launching an effort to establish a school, promoted efforts to win the first World war, was active in Red Cross work, was a member of Rotary club and the Chamber of Commerce, and participated in many civic movements, according to an old newspaper clipping.

The Rev. Sylvester J. Dowling, who was appointed to the Beloit parish from 1920 to 1923, and his successor, the Rev. C. F. McBride, who stayed in Beloit five years, were classmates.

Father Dowling was transferred to a Racine parish in 1923 to replace a priest who had been the center of a factional fight in the parish for nearly two years. The Racine priest succeeded Father McBride, who was sent on to Beloit. Father Dowling was a chaplain at the state prison, Waupun, and was an authority on prison welfare.



Father Mathias J. Ward, pastor of St. Thomas' Catholic church in the years preceding and following the turn of the century, was instrumental in rebuilding the church, after the original stone church was destroyed by fire in 1884. He was known as one of the greatest temperance leaders of the faith.

Father McBride added a special children's mass to the Sunday services, and adults attending the mass were assessed 10 cents per seat. An ushers society was also organized at this time. In September, 1923, the congregation decided to sell their Liberty bonds and pay off a note held on the Broad st. school property. With money taken from cash and general funds they paid off the \$5,000 note and the interest, and then considered selling the property.

The Broad street property was considered undesirable as a school site because of the traffic and the distance pupils would have to travel to school. The following year, the archbishop came to Beloit to look over the property on the southeast corner of Keeler and Nelson aves., which the congregation was considering for a school site, with a view of moving the church to that same location. While here, during his visit, he was also queried on the possibility of constructing a public hospital for the city, and the enlarging and incorporating of the Catholic cemetery as Calvary cemetery.

With the archbishop's approval, the parish decided to purchase the property, and to sell the Broad st. property, however the latter property was not sold until years later. Eventually the land in the northeast part of the city was also disposed of.

In 1926, the parish installed steam heat, and in 1928, while Father Leist was here, remodeled the church basement into a meeting and dining hall, with a complete kitchen. The church was re-roofed in 1931 with asbestos shingles, applied French style, and a new cross was erected on the tower. Records show that Father Leist and his parish underwent a series of ups and downs in their plans for a school. The matter was not settled until years later, following Father O'Reilly's appointment.

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BORN in Chicago, Father O'Reilly attended grade school at St. John's Cathedral in Milwaukee. His high school, philosophy and theology studies were undertaken at Marquette Academy, Milwaukee, and St. Francis Seminary at St. Francis, Wis. He was ordained at the seminary Oct. 28, 1920, and offered his first holy mass Oct. 31, at St. John's Cathedral.

Feb. 1, 1921, he was appointed to St. Joseph's church in Fond du Lac. He was appointed to St. Thomas' Aquinas church in Milwaukee. For more than two years before his Beloit appointment, he was assigned to the Holy Mother of Consolation church in Oregon, Wis.

Father O'Reilly's first assistant, the Rev. S. J. Ulik, arrived a year later, and stayed until July 24, 1936.

In 1935, the parish celebrated the golden jubilee of the rebuild-

ONE of the present assistants, the Rev. John W. Collins, came to St. Thomas' church from Grand Rapids, Mich., May 23, 1950. Prompted by a deep interest in music, Father Collins has instituted the once popular procedure of the congregation singing the mass. He now directs the congregation as though it were a great, huge choir, in singing the mass in Latin and in singing hymns.

Shortly after his ordination, the second curate, the Rev. Roman A. Wiedholz, came to Beloit on June 13, 1952. Among his many other parish duties, he directs the work and teaches Bible class at St. Peter Claver house, Athletic ave., an inter-racial house sponsored by the Blessed Martin guild of Madison.

In recent years, St. Thomas' parish has given several of its members to the priesthood, including the Rev. James Breton, Joseph S. Stier, Thomas C. Lourim and Gordon Hughes. Young women of the parish who have entered convents to become nuns include the Misses Mary Shea, Catherine Regan, Elizabeth Hauser, Louise Resler, Alice Brewer, Antoinette Chekouras, Patricia Schaefer, Mary Magner, Dorothy Birley and Joan Gosline.

Church officers, consultants and members of the advisory school committee met with Flad & Son architects to discuss the building of a school and convent in 1940. Members of this group included Kelley, Rosenthal, Lathers, E. J. McNeany, Crowley, Netzing, and Father O'Reilly.

World War II intervened, and school building plans were at a standstill for several years. In 1945, the parish raised a memorial fund in honor of Father O'Reilly's silver jubilee of his ordination, and the fund was incorporated into the school building fund. In 1946, an area opposite the Summit ay playgrounds was purchased as a school site for \$25,000. Construction of the \$200,000 school was begun in 1949. The congregation supported a house to house fund drive for \$102,052 in August of that year.

The modern school opened for classes in September, 1950, with Sisters of the Congregation of St. Agnes as teachers. The sisters live in a house east of the church.

Intermediate and high school grades are now housed in the school, with the high school classes supported jointly by St. Thomas and St. Jude's parishes.

On Sunday, May 10, the parish will celebrate its centennial in special services, including parish communion.

Bishop William P. O'Connor of the Madison diocese, under which the church now functions, will conduct the solemn closing to a period of 40 hours devotion at 4 p.m. Sunday afternoon. Further details concerning the event, will be announced later this month.



The first young men to be graduated from Beloit college, a struggling institution founded a few years before, received their diplomas in special exercises held in July of 1851. The trio, shown above, were Joseph Collie, William C. Hooker and Stephen D. Peet. The centennial class to receive diplomas Sunday afternoon will approximate 200 men and women.